United States Department of Agriculture



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November 15, 2004

WEST VIRGINIA BULLETIN NO: WV360-5-5

SUBJECT: PER – Fiscal Year 2005 NRCS Graduate Studies Program

Purpose: To announce the NRCS Graduate Studies Program for FY2005

Expiration Date: This bulletin expires February 1, 2005

ACTION REQUIRED BY: JANUARY 17, 2005

This is to announce the FY2005 NRCS Graduate Studies Program. The NRCS Graduate Studies Program pays tuition and related expenses for graduate studies to selected NRCS employees for the purpose of enhancing the Agency's expertise in targeted priority developmental needs areas.

The program is open to NRCS employees with competitive status at the GS-11 grade level or above, providing their supervisor concurs. Employees selected for this program will enter a formalized graduate study program at an accredited college or university.

Priority developmental areas have been determined in the technical and management curriculum. Only applicants requesting funding for degrees in those priority areas will be considered.

Selectees into the Graduate Studies Program will be required to sign a mobility agreement. This means that when a selectee completes a degree program, he or she must be prepared to be reassigned to another NRCS location where the greatest need is for the graduate's expertise.

WV360-5-05 PG2

Please note that employees have only one opportunity to apply for this program. All applications (included in the attachment) must be received in the State Office by January 17, 2005 to allow proper review by the State Office before being sent to the Director at the National Employee Development Center by Feb 1, 2005. Attached requirements and restrictions for application to this program are outlined in the announcement.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Larry Sargent, Human Resources Manager, (304) 284-7599.

/s/

LILLIAN V. WOODS
State Conservationist

Attachment - 2005 NRCS Graduate Studies Program

DIST: E

Attachment

ANNOUNCEMENT – 2005 NRCS GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM Page 1.

OPENING DATE: November 15, 2004

CLOSING DATE: February 1, 2005

Note: In order to receive consideration, all application materials must be completed and RECEIVED by the Director, National Employee Development Center, no later than February 1, 2005. Applications must **not** be sent by official mail or any other government owned or operated means (postage-paid agency envelopes, federal stamps, federal postage meters, facsimile, etc.). Any applications that arrive through these means **will not be evaluated**.

Submission of applications via facsimile to a government owned or operated machine is acceptable as long as they are sent from a private facility.

GENERAL:

Applicants may apply for study for either full-time or part-time at the college or university of their choice with the approval of their supervisor.

Any applications for degree plans outside of the approved curriculum areas will be not be considered. Approved curriculum areas are listed below. The agency may or may not send employees to graduate school in all identified degree areas listed below.

ACCEPTABLE AREAS OF STUDY.

The 2005 Graduate Studies Program is limited to the following areas of study:

Degree Area Emphasis Area

Soil Science or Earth Science Geostatistical Analysis

Soil Physics or Pedology Hydropedology

Environmental Law

Ag Engineering or Bio-Engineering Bionergy/Biomass

or Physical Science

Geology Fluvial Geomorphology

Environmental Engineer

Aquatic Sciences or Ecology
Atmospheric Sciences
Aquatic Biology
Atmospheric Ecology

Forest Management Agro-Forestry

Information Systems Technology Management Information Systems

Public Policy i.e Agricultural Public Policy Analysis

Public Administration

Under the guidance of the Director, National Employee Development Center, selectees will complete either a full-time or part-time advanced studies program. Full-time and part-time programs must be completed in 24 months for a Masters Degree. Full-time or part-time programs must be completed in 48 months for a Ph.D. Applications requesting a longer period of time than the above-specified time frames will not be considered unless good cause can be shown that the program must extend beyond that time.

Selectees are responsible for gaining admission into the identified academic institution, including satisfying all entrance requirements (e.g., GRE, GMAT, etc.). Upon proof of acceptance into the academic institution, NRCS will provide funding as requested in the applicant's proposal (including reimbursement for any admission expenses.)

Selectees will be required to sign a long-term service agreement (Employees Agreement to Continue in Service.) This Agreement will obligate the selectee, after having successfully completed his or her course of study, to remain in the employment of NRCS for a period of time commensurate with the length of training. The Agreement is in accordance with regulations outlined in section 4108 of title 5, United States Code, and Code of Federal Regulations 5 CFR 410.309. The Agreement states "I will serve in the agency three times the length of the training period. (The length of part-time training is the number of hours spent in class or with the instructor. The length of full-time training is eight hours for each day of training, up to a maximum of 40 hours a week). **The degree must be completed before required length of employment repayment time begins.** This applies to employees attending graduate school in either full-time or part-time schedules. Should the Agreement be violated, NRCS is authorized to obtain from the violator repayment of any or all of the monies expended by the agency for training of the violator through this program.

Selectees must remain in the Graduate Studies Program through completion of the academic program for which they were approved. Selectees must request permission in writing from the Director, NEDC to withdraw from the program, or change an approved academic program, (including changing from full-time to part-time). Full-time students will be required to attend school during the summer semester.

If a selectee is dismissed from the Graduate Studies Program, prior to completion of the program, for reasons originating with the selectee (e.g., failure to maintain academic requirements, accepting employment outside of NRCS, lack of desire to continue going to school, etc.) he or she will be required to repay NRCS for the amount of funds already expended. If a participant registers for a class and fails to make a passing grade, the participant is required to reimburse the agency the cost of repeating the class. This ruling is in accordance with 5CFR 410.405 (Protection of Government Interest.)

Selectees will be required to submit grades to the Director, NEDC. Other reporting instructions will be explained to each selectee. In addition, selectees will receive periodic telephone calls from NEDC, to discuss the selectee's progress and provide any assistance that may be needed.

Selectees will be required to sign a mobility agreement. This means that when a selectee completes a degree program, he or she must be prepared to be reassigned as designated by the agency. Failure to accept the reassignment may result in removal and reimbursement to NRCS of all costs expended by NRCS for the graduate studies of the participant including tuition, books, related fees and relocation and living expenses, if any. Graduates of the program who initially signed a mobility agreement and encounter unanticipated problems with mobility will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Reassignment of a graduate is at the complete discretion of the Agency. The employee may be required to accept a reassignment or may be required to remain at their current duty station.

Moving expenses for a participant who successfully obtains a graduate degree and is reassigned to another NRCS location will be incurred by the RECEIVING organizational unit.

WHO MAY APPLY

All NRCS employees who have competitive status and who hold a position at the GS-11 grade level or above (or equivalent pay system).

POSITION TITLE, SERIES, GRADE

For the duration of participation in the Graduation Studies Program, a selectee's position title and series will continue as though the participant were at his/her duty station.

LOCATION OF POSITION

For the duration of participation in the Graduate Studies Program, a selectee's duty station will continue to be whatever it was before entrance into the program.

ADMISSION AND FUNDING

Selectees are responsible for gaining admission into the identified academic institution, including satisfying all entrance requirements (e.g. GRE, GMAT, prerequisite courses, etc.) Upon proof of acceptance into the academic institution, NRCS will provide funding as requested in the applicant's proposal (including reimbursement for any admission expenses.)

QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENTS

All selectees must meet applicable college or university admission requirements and successfully complete all academic course work and related requirements. Use of NRCS Graduate Study Program funds will not be allowed for university required courses to meet entrance requirements into the university graduate school.

ANNOUNCEMENT – 2005 NRCS GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM

Page 4.

All applicants must be in GS-11 or higher positions, or equivalent pay system, by the date the completed application is received by the National Employee Development Center. The most recent Performance Work Plan for each applicant must document an "Achieved" rating.

- (1) The candidate must have exhibited an acceptable level of leadership potential.
- (2) The candidate must be recommended by their immediate supervisor.
- (3) The candidate must have the endorsement of at least one Senior Executive (besides the selecting official).

METHOD OF EVALUATION

The ultimate number of individuals selected will be the sole decision of NRCS. Incomplete or late arriving applications will not be considered. Applications will not be returned to the applicant. Initial screening will be based on a determination that the applicant meets the basic qualification requirements and the application package is complete. Applicants will be required to prepare a written response of no more than one page for each of the following selection criteria. The selection factors will include: a) applicant's degree program proposal compared to the development needs of NRCS relative to mission, new initiatives, mandates, etc; b) analysis of the costs of the proposed degree program, including actual expenses, time away from the job, etc., relative to the long-term benefits to NRCS; c) applicant's potential for successfully completing his or her studies and using the knowledge and skills obtained to make significant contributions to NRCS; d) Applicant's demonstrated commitment to self-development and e) applicant's demonstrated leadership potential.

The applications will then be submitted to a panel of subject matter experts in the disciplines for which applicants are being solicited. The panel will rate and rank the applications and forward a list of most qualified applicants, in rank order, to the selection team. The selection team, comprised of deputy chiefs, will make preliminary selections. Final selections will be made by the Chief. When ten or fewer applications are received from basically qualified candidates the alternative evaluation procedure will be used.

CONTACT PERSON FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Janie Wade
Training Specialist
National Employee Development Center
Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 6567
501 Felix – Building 23
Fort Worth, Texas 76115
Telephone: (817) 509-3258
e-mail – jwade@ftw.nrcs.usda.gov

PROCESS

If selected for the program, funding for tuition and related expenses will be transferred to the employee's servicing administrative office. Payment of a selectee's salary will be the responsibility of the selectee's Technology Support Center, State, etc. Payment of salaries for any temporary employees hired for the duration of a selectee's academic program will be the responsibility of the organization hiring the temporary employee.

HOW TO APPLY

All applicants must submit the following information **in order** to be considered for the NRCS Graduate Studies Program:

- 1. Application with all requested information completed. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- 2. Listing of last 5 positions held (by title), including a brief description of the duties, name of company or Federal agency and dates employed. Do NOT submit an SF-171. Use attached Work Experience Form.
- 3. Agreement Signed by Organization Head.
- 4. Four letters of recommendation--use attached "Reference Report on Applicant" form: (The form or recommendation may be transmitted separately.)
 - one from immediate supervisor,
 - one from organization head (state conservationist, Director, Technical Support Center, etc.) Note: If the organization head is your immediate supervisor, only three letters of recommendation are required.
 - one from NRCS senior executive (besides the selecting official). Selecting officials are the deputy chiefs.
- 5. Employee's Agreement to Continue in Service (Applicant must sign the "Employee's Agreement to Continue in Service" form attached.)
- 6. Employee's Mobility Agreement. (Applicant must sign the Employee's Mobility Agreement, attached.)
- 7. Your last Performance Work Plan (Form SCA 4140) completed, signed and dated by all applicable parties. The last appraisal must have been received within 18 months of the date of application submission.
- 8. OPM Form 1386, Background Survey Questionnaire 79-2 (optional).

9. A WRITTEN DISCUSSION OF NO MORE THAN ONE PAGE FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATED SELECTING CRITERIA INCLUDED WITH APPLICATION PACKAGE.

Please attach pages discussing selecting factors in a narrative format, as concisely as possible (type or print only.)

Selecting Criteria:

- A. Applicant's degree program proposal compared to the developmental needs of NRCS relative to mission, new initiatives, mandates, etc.
- B. Analysis of the costs of the proposed degree program, including actual expenses, time away from the job, etc., relative to the long-term benefits to NRCS.
- C. Applicant's potential for successfully completing his or her studies and using the knowledge and skills obtained to make significant contributions to NRCS.
- D. Applicant's demonstrated commitment to self-development.
- E. Applicant's demonstrated leadership potential.

Candidates will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability, political beliefs, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, parental status, or protected genetic information and in accordance with recognized merit promotion guidelines.

In order to receive consideration, all application materials must be completed and **RECEIVED** by the Director, National Employment Development Center, no later than February 1, 2005. Applications must **not** be sent by official mail or any other government owned or operated means (postage-paid agency envelopes, federal stamps, federal postage meters, facsimile, etc.). Any applications that arrive through these means will not be evaluated.

Send application package to:

Janie Wade, Training Specialist Natural Resources Conservation Service National Employee Development Center P.O. Box 6567 501 Felix Street, Building 23 Fort Worth, Texas 76115

Note: When submitting application, submit **only** this and the following pages entitled "Application". **Do not** submit any of the previous pages entitled "Announcement".

Privacy Act Statement

Sections 1302, 3301, and 3304 of Title 5 of the United States Code provide the authority for requesting this information. Failure to provide the requested information may prevent your name from being considered for the NRCS Graduate Studies Program. Your social security number will be used for record identification purposes only.

Name:	
Social Security Number:	
•	
Residential Address:	
Home Telephone:	

Office Name: (no abbreviations/spell out)	
Office Address:	
Office Telephone	
E-Mail Address	
Pay Plan, Series, Grade	
Present Job Title	
i resem jou time	

1. ACADEMIC STUDIES PROPOSAL

Instructions: The applicant should use this section to fully describe existing academic credentials, the proposed academic institution and the proposed course of study.

We urge applicants to consult closely with the academic institution of choice, to insure the application accurately reflects the proposed course of study. Minor discrepancies are to be expected. However, selectees will not be permitted to later submit materials for a course of study far different from that proposed, simply because adequate research was not done in advance.

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etc.	academic credentials, e.g., BS, Engineering; MA, Public Adminis
	cademic institution at which you propose to pursue your studies, a titution, and whether it uses the semester or quarter system.
College/U	Jniversity
Address_	
Semester	Quarter
In the spa	ace provided, describe the course of study you propose to pursue:
1. Area o	of study (e.g., Agronomy – Nutrient Management, Public Policy et
	sed degree plan (e.g., MA, Ph.D., etc.)

Whether you are already enrolled in an academ ontinue under the Graduate Studies Program (incocument, course outline, and grade reports.) Whether you propose to pursue studies on a full/HY.	
• • • •	
	l-time or part-time basis,

2. PROPOSED COST ESTIMATE

Instructions: Provide a detailed estimate of what your proposed course of study will cost. You are urged to consult closely with your academic institution of choice when preparing these estimates. You are urged to also consult closely with your financial management staff on projected travel costs. (Note: no selectee will change duty stations for the purpose of this program and NO moving expenses will be paid. If selectees have proposed an academic institution outside of the commuting area, HE or SHE will be responsible for any moving expenses incurred.) Fund distribution to selectee's organization will be made based on the estimates provided. Further funds will not be distributed based on a too-low estimate, simply because a selectee did not do adequate research. APPLICANTS are responsible for ensuring that the proposed cost estimates are accurate and sufficient.

The following information MUST be included:

- 1) Cost per course hour; tuition breakdown by year (2005 amount, 2006 amount, etc.); total estimated tuition amount for studies program.
- 2) Cost estimate of books by fiscal year; total estimated amount for books for studies program.
- 3) Description and cost estimate of other materials by fiscal year; total estimate for other materials for studies program.
- 4) Description and justification for projected travel expenses.
- 5) Estimate of travel expenses by fiscal year; total estimate of travel expenses for studies program.
- 6) Total cost of program by fiscal year.
- 7) Grand total of program cost.

A. Projected Costs - Tuition

B. Projected Costs - Books

C. Projected Costs - Other Materials

D. Projected Costs - Travel

E.	Total Pro	iected	Costs	bv	Fiscal	Year

(If annual amounts vary, please so note.)

Summary Costs

Tuition:_____

Books:

Other Materials:_____

Travel:_____

Fiscal Year Total:_____

Grand Total – _____

Total funding amount being requested to complete program

\$_____

AGREEMENT

Note: This agreement should be signed by the applicant's organizational head, e.g., state conservationist, technical support center director, division director, etc.

I certify that:

- 1) In the event this applicant is selected for the Graduate Studies Program, we agree to pay his/her salary for the period of time the individual remains in the Graduate Studies Program. We agree to pay the salary of any employee we hire to perform the duties of the selectee, during his or her absence.
- 2) In the event this applicant is selected for the Graduate Studies Program, we agree to return to the Director, National Employee Development Center, any funds transferred to this organization for the purpose of financing the selectee's program, should the selectee be removed from the program prior to completion.
- 3) In the event this applicant is selected for the Graduate Studies Program, we agree to permit the individual to attend classes on duty time, according to the full or part-time schedule outlined in this proposal. We also agree to notify the Director, NEDC of any change to the employee's status i.e. part-time verses full-time.
- 4) In the event the applicant is selected, he/she agrees to be considered for reassignment at graduation based on an agency wide review of expertise needs. The applicant understands that reassignment is not automatic but could occur at agency discretion to meet expertise needs.

(Organizational head signature)	(Date)	
(Position title)		
(Applicant signature)	(Date)	

EMPLOYEE'S MOBILITY AGREEMENT

(Date)

(Signature)

PART 410 - EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

410.50(d)

NRCS-PER-705

Note: This agreement must be signed by the nominee for all non-government training that exceeds 80 hours (or such other designated period, 80 hours or less, as prescribed by the agency) and for which the Government approves payment of training costs prior to the commencement of such training. Nothing contained in Section G below shall be construed as limiting the authority of an agency to waive, in whole or in part, an obligation of an employee to pay expenses incurred by the Government in connection with the training.

Section G - EMPLOYEE'S AGREEMENT TO CONTINUE IN SERVICE

- 1. I AGREE that, upon completion of the Government sponsored training described in this request, I will serve in the agency three times the length of the training period. (The length of part-time training is the number of hours spent in class or with the instructor. The length of full-time training is eight hours for each day of training, up to a maximum of 40 hours a week). NOTE: For the purposes of this agreement, the term "agency" refers to the employing organization (such as an Executive Department or independent establishment), not to a segment of such an organization.
- 2. If I voluntarily leave the agency before completing the period of service agreed to in item 1 above, I AGREE to reimburse the agency for the tuition and related fees, travel and other special expenses (EXCLUDING SALARY) paid in connection with my training. These amounts are reflected in items 21 and 22.
- 3. I FURTHER AGREE that, if I voluntarily leave the agency to enter the service of another federal agency or other organization in any branch of the Government before completing the period of service agreed to in item 1 above, I will give my organization written notice of at least ten work days, during which time a determination concerning reimbursement will be made. If I fail to give this advance notice, I AGREE to pay the amount of additional expenses (5 U.S.C. 4108(a)(2) incurred by the Government in this training.
- 4. I understand that any amounts which may be due the agency as a result of any failure on my part to meet the terms of this agreement may be withheld from any monies owed me by the Government, or may be recovered by such other methods as are approved by law.
- 5. I FURTHER AGREE to obtain approval from my organization training officer and that person responsible for authorizing non-government training requests of any proposed change in my approved training program involving course and schedule changes, withdrawals or incompletions, and increased costs.
- 6. I acknowledge that this agreement does not in any way commit the Government to continue my employment. I understand that, if there is a transfer of my service obligation to another federal agency or other organization in any branch of the Government, the agreements in items 1,2, and 3 of this section will remain in effect until I have completed my obligated service with that other agency or organization.

PART 410 - EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM I. WORK EXPERIENCE

Current Position	Grade
Date Entering Position	
Primary Responsibilities	
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Current Position	Grade
Date Entering Position	
Primary Responsibilities	
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Current Position	Grade
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Current Position	Grade
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Current Position	Grade
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Date Entering Position	
Primary Responsibilities	

PART 410 - EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

U.S.D.A. NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM REFERENCE REPORT ON APPLICANT

Applicant Name ______Respondent Name _____

	Below Average	Average	Good	Superior	Inadequate Opportunity to Observe
Ability to master academic work					to Observe
Ability in oral expression					
Ability to write					
Motivation					
Maturity					
Self-reliance and independence					
Ability to work with others					
Creative or innovative					
How long have you k	known the applicant?_				
In what connection?					
			that will assist		

BACKGROUND SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE 79-2

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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS The information from this survey is used to help insure that agency personnel practices meet the requirements of Federal law. Your responses are voluntary. Please answer each of the questions to the best of your ability. Please print entries in pencil or pen. Use only capital letters. Read each item thoroughly before completing the appropriate code number in each box.					PRIVACY ACT INFORMATION					N
				GENERAL This information is provided pursuant to Public Law 93-579 (Privacion 1974), December 31, 1974, for individuals completing Federal related forms that solicit personal information. AUTHORITY Sections 1302, 3301, 3304, and 7201 of Title 5 of the U.S. Code. PURPOSE AND ROUTINE USES The information from this survey is used for research and for a Federal					Code. for a Federal equipment of personnel prostions concerning	
Name (Last, First, MI)				1	Pro	widing this informade based on	EFFECT mation is this infor	S OF NONDISC voluntary. No i	ndividual per	
Position for which you are applying	Date (Month, Da	ay. Ye	ear)	1	Sol nei dat	NUMBER icitation of the S Management is ed November 22	ONDER P Social Sec authorize 1, 1943. It	CUBLIC LAW 93- curity Number (5 ed under provisi is used to relate incies and the Off	-579, SECTION SSN) by the lions of Execute this form w	ON 7 (b) Office of Perso utive Order 939
1. Social Security Number	_!	2.	Yea	r of	Birth		T			
	(CC 1-9)	1	9	T		(CC 10-11)				
4. How did you learn about the	particular positi	on o	r exa	m to	or wh	ich you are a	applying	1?		
(You may select up to three of	choices.)									
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(CC 41-44)

OPM Form 1386 (10/79)

(CC 22-27)

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(CC 28-31)